

Wycombe on a slippery slope to the sea

By Clive White

It was the sort of swift, incisive counter-attack that usually knocks the opposition cold. Yet Wycombe Wanderers survived this double-fisted assault a few minutes from the end of Saturday's FA Cup tie and lived to fight another day—Wednesday evening, to be precise, when the foe will again be Bournemouth after this goalless draw.

Up until those last few minutes AFC Bournemouth, of the Football League, had been taking a pounding on the ropes, but when Welsh broke away and flighted the ball beautifully out to Greenhalgh, Wycombe's fine dreams began to cloud over. However, like all good Cup stories, it had a fairy-tale ending and following Greenhalgh's pass Maskell, the Wycombe goalkeeper, saved splendidly, twice in quick succession, from ferocious shots by the big winger, Wingate, and Parodi.

So Wycombe, for the first time in their history, went into the third round draw, held on BBC television's Match of the Day on Saturday evening. They were first

out of the bag and when the name of Middlesbrough immediately followed you could almost hear the calculations going on in the Wycombe treasurer's head. But first Wycombe must get past Bournemouth, and it is a pretty big but.

Certainly on Saturday at Loakes Park Wycombe did not deserve to draw. They deserved to win. How much they were helped by their sloping pitch was hard to tell. It seemed to inhibit Bournemouth for quite a while, though Wycombe, it is said, do not make the full use of it. One wonders what Jack Charlton, the manager of Middlesbrough, would make of it.

Bournemouth got an early introduction to Wycombe's little bit of the Chiltern Hills. As they ran out before the kick-off one Bournemouth player threw out the ball in the usual manner only to watch in horror as it continued to roll right across the pitch down the 11ft slope. When Wycombe came out they threw the ball upwards and lengthways. Professionals must have nightmares about playing on pitches just like this one, and it was a nightmare that became all too real. They soon discovered

that their professional slickness was no match for the "amateurs'" enthusiasm in midfield.

The first half was not a particularly good one as these games go, but after half-time Wycombe really carried the game to their opponents, completely over-running them. Bournemouth's centre half, Delaney, who spent four seasons with Wycombe as captain, could do little about it.

Horseman—a chairmaker by trade—missed two golden opportunities because he sat on them longer than was necessary, and Charlton, the young Bournemouth goalkeeper, made a number of excellent reaction saves. In the closing minutes Bournemouth cleared another effort off the line and passions ran high. Wycombe supporters appealed for everything, even when it was clearly not theirs, but they deserved more breaks than they got.

WYCOMBE WANDERERS: J. Maskell, P. Birdseye, G. Hand, K. Mead, A. Phillips, T. Reardon, S. Perrin, H. Kennedy, K. Searte, M. Holtfield, A. Horseman.

AFC BOURNEMOUTH: K. Charlton, C. Payne, K. Miller, T. Howard, J. Delaney, N. Hague, J. Wingate, A. Welsh, H. Goddard, B. Greenhalgh, L. Parodi.